

**Official Public Hearing Transcript
Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
US-31 Freeway Connection to I-94**

A public hearing was held in accordance with Federal and State Public Involvement/Public Hearing Procedures. The hearing was held Wednesday, October 30, 2002 at Mendel Center at Lake Michigan Community College, Benton Harbor, with an afternoon session from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and an evening session from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. One hundred-thirty (130) people attended, of whom 12 provided audio-recorded comments and 26 provided them in writing.

Legal notices announcing the hearings were placed in the October 16 and 23, 2002 issues of the Herald-Palladium in St. Joseph, Michigan. As mentioned in the notices, the official record was held open to include comments postmarked on or before November 30, 2002. MDOT received written comments from the Cornerstone Alliance, an economic development organization, and the Berrien County Planning Commission. Additionally, eight persons provided comments by way of mail/E-mail/phone, including outgoing State Senator Harry Gast.

Complete copies of the transcripts and written comments, along with the draft environmental document are available for public review at Berrien Charter Township Hall, Lake Michigan College's William Hessel Library, Berrien County Road Commission, Southwestern Michigan Commission Office, MDOT's Coloma Transportation Service Center and MDOT's Southwest Region Office.

Summary of Comments

- Prefers PA-4 because it is the most direct route. (7)
- Alternatives 2 and 3 are cheap quick fixes and don't fit the requirements. Spend the money and get it right the first time.
- PA-2 is best option overall because it has the least impact on the surrounding area, costs considerably less to construct than PA-4, and meets the needs of the local community as a whole. (6)
- Would like to see PA-2 built because it has safer entrance and egress locations.
- 77,000 ADT between interchanges on I-94 for PA-2 is a very busy section of road.
- Originally felt PA-4 would be the best option in regards to safety issues, but have now been persuaded that PA-2 is just as safe and reduces the cost considerably. (I think you have done your homework).
- PA-2 is the best alternative.
- Totally against completion of the project. The entire project is a waste of tax dollars.
- Unaware of any details concerning percentages of traffic movements. If Benton Harbor traffic is the mainstream of traffic movement then PA-2 would be logical. However, if the majority of traffic crosses I-94 to US-31, then PA-2 would be a safer and simpler option without the clover leafs and merges associated with PA-2 and PA-3.
- Stop the road; PA-2 is an intrusion onto my property and a waste of my tax dollars. I have nothing to benefit from any of the alternatives.
- Concerned about increased water run-off from construction on existing sand and clay material which has poor permeability alone.
- PA-2 would be the best option to minimize impacts to the local community.
- The no-build and PA-1 are absolutely wrong for the community.

- PA-4 is the best option in the long run as it would reduce traffic on I-94 and MDOT has already purchased much of the required land and property.
- The no-build and PA-2 are the best solutions to the problem.
- Prefers PA-4 to PA-2 because of the safety issue in merging one lane of traffic on I-94 (from south to north). Feel that a slow driver attempting to merge onto I-94 eastbound would have difficulty during heavy traffic which will cause a back-up or an accident. MDOT will only build this thing once, so give priority to safety and lose the butterfly and golf course.
- Believe that PA-2 is the most practical of all the proposals, particularly from the aspects of traffic control, costs and diminished environmental impact. Presentations were excellent. Thank you!
- To prevent accidents from excessive traffic, the intersection of Highland Avenue and Benton Center Road should be made a 4-way stop. Likewise the intersection of Territorial Road and Benton Center Road should be made a 4-way stop. Currently Benton Harbor Road is used as an alternate route between Napier Avenue and I-196 Exit 1.
- PA-2 is the best route to take, including the fourth lane to enter I-94 and I-196.
- Concerned that Napier Road needs traffic signals at the entrances to Lake Michigan College until the new freeway connection is built due to the number of persons entering and leaving the college, and the heavy through traffic on Napier Road.
- Urges MDOT to build the so-called "butterfly bridge" because the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.
- Wants a noise barrier to deal with noise levels already bad at I-94/I-196 interchange that will only get worse with the US-31 connection.
- Ending the freeway at Napier Road is the safest way to go.
- Why is the department purchasing property for right-of-way when it doesn't appear as though there is any sure funding available to build that road? Let's live with Napier Road ending it for now and then buy the property only when money for building it becomes available.
- Anything short of building PA-4 is criminal. The butterfly can be relocated to Hillsdale County. PA-2 puts vehicles onto I-94 with approximately 50 seconds think time until Interstate I-196. This is an Interstate highway not a penetrator route for Benton Harbor.
- PA-2 will make it easier for suppliers and customers to find our business.
- The picture on the brochure must have been taken in 1964, because it certainly is not the traffic that I see on I-94 at the present time.
- In merging onto I-94 from I-196 you normally have to be traveling in the range of 75 miles an hour. At least three times I've had to go up into excess of 80 miles an hour to make this merge; and pulling a boat trailer, this is, quite frankly, very dangerous.
- Likes PA-2 because it will help with economic development by improving the connection with Benton Harbor.
- Go straight.
- Does not like the one lane feeding into three under Territorial Bridge because on weekends it is not going to be enough capacity to handle the traffic.
- Ending US-31 at any juncture besides a major interstate diminishes the economic gains to be seen. Holding off on completing the project means funding might never materialize, or priorities at the state and federal level for projects could change.

Therefore, the route chosen should be the most manageable and realistic for completion.

- If US-31 connects to the business loop, it provides an easy way for county residents to get into St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, from the north, east and south. It would also provide easy access from St. Joe and Benton Harbor to Niles and South Bend.
- It is imperative that the new US-31 extension connect up at the base of I-196. There are no acceptable alternatives. This is a major highway that will be used 24/7 for generations...let's not after 30 years mess up the project.